



The Race Equality Hub: a new approach to tackling racial inequality in Liverpool City Region

Emy Onuora
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority



The Liverpool City Region

Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020

The Race Equality Hub: a new approach to tackling racial inequality in Liverpool City Region

Key takeaways

1. Current approaches to racism and race inequality are often characterised by short-term political concerns and a lack of will to address entrenched, long-term issues.
2. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities experience a sense of abandonment after promises 'to learn lessons' have been broken by those in power. Promises to address structural inequalities must be followed through.
3. Long term investment and sustainable solutions are required to address deep-rooted and systemic racism. The Liverpool City Region Race Equality Hub sets out a strategic approach to tackling race inequalities in the city-region.
4. Solutions must be developed 'in conjunction with', rather than designed 'on behalf of' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, through processes of power-sharing and co-design.
5. Enabling the potential of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to be realised could add some £300million per annum to the LCR economy, representing an important economic opportunity in addition to the moral and ethical case for tackling race inequalities.

1. Introduction

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 acted as the catalyst for global protests and demonstrations in support of racial equality and justice. Here in the UK, protests, vigils and demonstration took place across the length and breadth of the country and Liverpool City Region (LCR) saw protests take place at St Georges Hall and Princes Park in the city.

This is not the first time that the nation has experienced a degree of soul searching in response to national, or in this case international events that have highlighted acute levels of racism and racial inequality. The Scarman Report (1981) and Macpherson Report (1999) were both produced following public inquiries into racial inequality. However in both cases the political spotlight soon moved to other matters and after a period of short-term political pressure, debates about the nature of inequality and how it might be addressed had completed their day in the sun and normal service had resumed.

Within LCR, concerns about the lack of employment opportunities - particularly for young people - have been evident for several decades. An article in The Times from September 1980 articulated the perception of inequality in the city's retail sector - a perception that remains to this day:

"In Liverpool, a city with possibly the oldest "black" community in Britain, a multi-racial country, hardly a non-white face is to be seen serving in the shops of Lord, Dale or Church Street. Yet many of the city's "local-born blacks" live within half an hour's walk."

2. Liverpool City Region Race Equality Programme

Recognising that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) can and should do more to support and promote race equality across our city region, we have developed an overarching Race Equality Programme in response to global demands for racial justice. The programme began with a data gathering and research exercise to try and understand levels of racial inequality within LCR.

The evidence gathered was simultaneously shocking and unsurprising in outlining the starkness of long-standing inequity in our region. Some of the key highlights of our evidence gathering work revealed that some minority ethnic groups were:

- More likely to die in childbirth
- More likely to be born into poverty
- Less likely to meet early years development milestones
- Less likely to gain strong passes in English and Maths GCSE
- Likely to be paid lower wages, including those paid to minority ethnic graduates
- Three times more likely to be the subject of stop and search in LCR
- Twice as likely as their white counterparts not to own their own home
- Likely to have lower levels of overall life satisfaction

In response to these findings, LCRCA published a Declaration of Intent (DOI) in March 2021 that set out its commitments to tackle racial inequality within the organisation and in the wider city region. In addition to the DOI, in July 2021 LCRCA agreed to set aside considerable funding and resources to establish a Race Equality Hub that would seek to address inequality in employment and skills within the city region.

This paper considers that a new approach recognising the limitations of previous approaches and centring the needs of minority ethnic communities is urgently required. In light of LCR's history and the current Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, this new approach needs not only to recognise the systemic, institutional and individual features of racial inequality but needs to work closely with those communities with lived experience of racism to identify solutions and strategies. The development of a Race Equality Hub represents a long-term strategy that will continue to address racial inequality, long after George Floyd and BLM fade from memory.

3. Race inequalities in Liverpool City Region

Familiar figures such as David Yip, John Conteh, Rebecca Ferguson, Trent Alexander Arnold, Craig Charles and Natasha Jonas, amongst others, have emerged from LCR's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to achieve national and international success. However, outside of the narrow confines of the sport and entertainment industries, there lies untapped potential within these communities.

Three key elements make Liverpool and the wider city region unique: its innovation, its culture and its people (KQ Liverpool 2021). However, these three elements, so important to the region's identity and key to its economic development, have failed to include and harness the skills and expertise that might otherwise emerge from the city's black and minority ethnic communities.

A LCRCA-funded report from the Nia Business Hub (2021) on the LCR business eco-system noted there is no shortage of entrepreneurial spirit amongst minority ethnic communities, but highlighted the lack of support from mainstream business services to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic entrepreneurship and businesses. Existing business advice and support to access funding opportunities were found to be inadequate in meeting the needs of minority ethnic community businesses aspiring to grow. Even basic tools such as a directory of black businesses were absent, the existence of which would provide a useful starting point to enable minority ethnic businesses to be targeted for support.

On culture, the Generations For Change project, part of the LCRCA Race Equality Programme, has highlighted the difficulties for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic creatives, artists and cultural practitioners to gain a foothold in the industry (LCRCA/ Curious Minds 2022). In their experience, they found difficulty in obtaining commissions outside Black History Month and to see themselves represented in senior and leadership positions within the wider arts and cultural sector.

Our research identifies an absence of opportunities to harness the perspectives, experience and knowledge of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to identify and develop solutions to racial inequality (Innervision 2021). This may be a reflection of the short-term nature of political will to bring about meaningful change to address racial inequality.

Approaches to racial inequality typically begin with an incidence of racial injustice, followed by a crisis management approach from large institutions involving promises to 'do better' or 'learn lessons'. This is quickly followed by the creation of a new role, policy or other activity, until the initial momentum inevitably dissipates and organisations return to business as usual. Eventually those high-profile initiatives are gradually de-prioritised and disappear before they can be fully evaluated in order to understand their impact (Innervision 2021).

Our research found that developing a meaningful approach to tackling racial inequality must focus on the following features:

- A long-term race equality strategy, insulated from the volatility of short-term political and funding imperatives.
- A long-term commitment involving a focus on culture change by ensuring that systems, processes and behaviours that serve to marginalise and exclude are dismantled.
- A recognition that what replaces this might be unknown and concerning, particularly for those who have benefitted most from exclusionary processes.
- Progressive and inclusive practices will bring benefits by utilising the hitherto untapped potential of minority ethnic communities in support of the ideas, stakeholders, customers, bottom-lines and profitability of organisations.

4. Key messages from communities

Racism, as a structural, deep-rooted and long-term phenomenon, requires a long-term approach that recognises it cannot be tackled solely by writing new policies or strategies. In developing the Race Equality Hub, LCRCA carried out significant engagement work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, with some clear messages and themes emerging:

- A plea for action, rather than words. Pronouncements of commitment to race equality must be matched with tangible action that brings about change.
- Recognition that change will not occur in the short-term and that long-term interventions are required.
- For a Race Equality Hub to be Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic led. This would provide positive role models for young people of all ethnicities and ensure the organisation's leadership provides a minority ethnic perspective in its attempt to tackle racial inequalities in the employment and skills market.

For services to be co-designed in conjunction with communities, rather than an approach in which new policies are provided for consultation, with little opportunity for significant amendments to be made. Co-design requires organisations to cede power to those with lived experience of racism, in order to identify barriers and develop solutions more likely to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

5. Development of the Race Equality Hub

There are some upcoming opportunities to bring about tangible change. The city region has identified a number of key sectors in which there is room for growth. It will be critical to ensure that the Hub is able to develop positive action initiatives within these growth sectors to provide support that enables minority ethnic groups to access these opportunities, and enable them to be retained and progress through the sector. In addition, our engagement work informed us that there was a need to address both the supply and demand of employment opportunities.

This means providing support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to enter careers and progress into leadership roles and to enable minority ethnic enterprises to become established and grow, but also to develop the demand side. This means providing support for public, private and third sector organisations to change their systems and practices in ways that will enable them to diversify their workplaces and develop organisational cultures that support minority ethnic career development and progression.

It also involves upskilling minority ethnic businesses to ensure they are contract-ready to bid for tenders, commission and procurement opportunities and to also provide support for diversifying boardrooms and governance structures. Overall, the Hub is to operate as a place where knowledge and expertise in race equality is co-ordinated and harnessed for the good of minority ethnic communities and the wider city region.

In gathering evidence for developing a response to race inequality on a regional basis, we expected to find models of good practice that could act as a blueprint for developing approaches to tackling inequality. Despite researching other parts of the UK, Europe and North America, there were no other successful models for which the city region could base its own approach. Therefore, the model for the Race Equality Hub is built upon our engagement work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Progress towards the establishment of the Race Equality Hub is now gathering pace. A number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic business advisors and consultants, academics, entrepreneurs and marketing experts, among others, are currently tasked with developing the Hub's key service delivery areas and commercial and business plans, and it is anticipated that the Hub will open its doors to the public in Autumn 2022.

A critical part of developing the Hub's key features will be comprehensive co-design processes to be undertaken with minority ethnic communities, entrepreneurs, businesses and young people from across LCR.

Additionally, co-design activity will also take place with companies and organisations who seek to diversify their workforce but require support to enable them to do so. Utilising Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic expertise with the lived experience of racism to develop meaningful solutions will provide the best chance of addressing the deep-rooted, long-standing labour market inequalities that act as an impediment to the economic growth and the development of black and minority ethnic communities, limit potential of our young people and blight the city region's reputation for its commitment to social justice.

6. Conclusion

The Race Equality Hub represents an innovative approach to race equality that if successful can provide a model to address racial inequality for other cities and city regions both in the UK and abroad. The key requirements to ensure the success of the Hub will be the political will to recognise and understand the issues and to take the radical action necessary to bring about change. Our research informs us that if we were to reduce the levels of inequality between our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents, compared to their white counterparts, we would add some £300 million each year to the local economy.

This economic case further strengthens the assertion that a long-term approach is required to tackle decades of inequality and that this needs to be backed up with long-term planning and identification of funding opportunities. This will ensure the viability of the Hub long after the short-term political will has ended.

Finally, and most importantly, placing marginalised communities at the centre of processes to identify barriers and seek meaningful solutions is critical in garnering community support and confidence. This will provide the best opportunity to ensure the Hub's success and ensure that our region - whose social, economic and industrial history and development is inextricably tied up with the slave trade and colonialism - provides a model that acts as inspiration to others at home and abroad.

7. References

Belchem, John. (2014) *Before the Windrush: Race Relations in 20th Century Liverpool*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority/ Curious Minds (2022) *Generations For Change Project Closure Report*. Liverpool: LCRCA

Innervision (2021) *Race Equality Programme Labour Market Positive Action Employment Infrastructure Review*. Liverpool: LCRCA

KQ Liverpool (2021) *What differentiates Liverpool from other UK cities?*. Liverpool: KQ Liverpool. Available at: [What-differentiates-Liverpool-from-other-UK-cities.pdf](https://www.kqliverpool.co.uk/what-differentiates-liverpool-from-other-uk-cities.pdf) (kqliverpool.co.uk)

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2021) *Race Equality Declaration of Intent*. Liverpool: LCRCA. Available at: <https://modern.gov/merseytravel.gov.uk/documents/s52765/Race%20Equality%20LCRCA%20Declaration%20of%20Intent.pdf>

Macpherson, William. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London: The Home Office. Available at: [4262.pdf](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/4262/4262.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Kuumba Imani Millenium Centre and Teach Consultancy (2021) *Barriers and Enablers Influencing the Inclusion and Prosperity of Black Entrepreneurs and Businesses in the Liverpool City Region: Research Report and Recommendations*. Liverpool: NIA Black Business Hub

Scarman, Leslie George. (1982) *The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April 1981: The Scarman Report*. London: Penguin

The Times (1980) 'Liverpool's unique "local born blacks"'. 1st September.

The Heseltine Institute is an interdisciplinary public policy research institute which brings together academic expertise from across the University of Liverpool with policy-makers and practitioners to support the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and city regions.

Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place
University of Liverpool, 1-7 Abercromby Square, Liverpool, L69 7ZH

Follow us @livuniheseltine

About the author

Emy Onuora is Race Equality Project Manager at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and has managed a range of race equality and social justice initiatives. His particular interest is in race equality in sport and education. He currently project manages the establishment and development of the Race Equality Hub.

The information, practices and views in this Policy Briefing are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Heseltine Institute.

Our cover image, 'Liverpool Summer 21', is licensed from Tim Jokl under CC BY-NC 2.0. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tmjokl/51228444973/>

Policy Briefs can be accessed at: www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute